Mosher, R., Pamplin, L., Delanoy, N., & Brown, B. (2022). School leadership standards and graduate education: Instructional negotiations of theory, practice, and policy regulation. *International Journal for Leadership in Learning*, *22*(2), 104–139. https://doi.org/10.29173/ijll22.

School Leadership Standards and Graduate Education: Instructional Negotiations of Theory, Practice, and Policy Regulation [1]

Ronna Mosher, Lori Pamplin, Nadia Delanoy, and Barbara Brown

Abstract

The presence of school leadership standards in graduate education has come to influence the scope and content of leadership programs, highlighting tensions between political, practical, and scholarly views of leaders and leadership. This paper reports on a study of instructional practices within a graduate program in educational leadership connected to the *Alberta Leadership Quality Standard* to explore how instructors, as policy actors, encounter leadership standards not just as policies of compliance but of possibility. We interpret interview data from three faculty members through the lens of policy enactment to understand how their instruction negotiated relationships of theory and practice and how they negotiated the policy-based regulatory discourses associated with school leadership standards. Working between images of policy standards as text and discourse, findings show instructors engaged in dialogic commitments that help students develop practical and scholarly competencies while displacing the authority of standards, recontextualizing the standardization of leadership, and displacing the standards' normative gaze.

Keywords: leadership standards; graduate education; K-12 leaders; policy enactment

[1] This study was supported by a Werklund School of Education Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Grant

Introduction

Education jurisdictions across the world have defined, legislated, and are seeking to refine professional practice standards for K-12 leaders. In response to intensified educational accountability measures (Elmore, 2004; Møller, 2009), a conceptual shift from managerial to instructional leadership (Gumus et al., 2018; Hallinger, 2005; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Wahlstrom, 2012), and an accompanying body of research establishing school leaders' significant influence on instructional practices (Neumerski, 2013; Rigby, 2014; Robinson et al., 2008) and educational outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson et al., 2009; Silins & Mulford, 2002; Waters et al., 2003), leadership standards have been positioned as strategic tools for ensuring and improving the practice of school leaders, and through leadership practice, the overall quality of K-12 education (Pont, 2013).

With a focus on competencies of professional practice, leadership standards have come to play a role in the selection, development, and evaluation of school leaders and often form the basis of leadership licensing or certification requirements (Van Rosendaal, 2018). Leadership standards have also come to influence the scope and content of graduate programs in educational leadership (Orr, 2006, 2010). As K-12 educators seek to satisfy educational requirements for leadership certification through advanced study, post-secondary institutions must demonstrate to both governments and potential students the alignment between their graduate professional programs and the certification standards or risk their programmatic relevance, student enrollment, and overall viability.

Situated amid discourses of responsible representation (Mulcahy, 2011; Murphy, 2000, 2015), professional self-direction (Ingvarson et al., 2006), and performative policies of normalized knowledge and identity (Anderson & Cohen, 2015; Clarke & Moore, 2013; Shore & Wright, 2011;

Thomas, 2008) leadership standards, like teaching standards, are entwined with contested images of professional responsibility, autonomy, and regulation. The presence of professional practice standards in graduate education further accentuates complexities in the intentions and implications of professional standards and highlights tensions and entanglements among governmental, practice-based, and scholarly views of leaders and leadership.

While existing research has provided critical conceptual perspectives on the place of leadership standards in university settings (English, 2003, 2006; Gronn, 2002; Pavlakis & Kelley, 2016), and explored how leadership standards shape the experience and practice of school principals (Militello et al., 2013; Riveros et al., 2016), our interests are in understanding how faculty members navigate relationships of scholarship and practice in a context influenced by leadership standards. We report here on a study of instructional practices in a Master of Education program in educational leadership redesigned to meet certification requirements for the *Alberta Leadership Quality Standard* (Alberta Education, 2020), and how these practices, accessed as examples of cognitive apprenticeship (Collins et al., 1989, 1991), and viewed through the lens of policy enactment (Ball, 1993, 2015; Ball et al., 2011, 2012; Maguire et al., 2015), negotiated scholarly, practical, and regulatory interests in the development of school leaders. In asking how instructors negotiate compatibilities and tensions between theoretical insights and practical competency requirements, we also explore how instructors, as policy actors, negotiate leadership standards, not just as policies of compliance, but of possibility.

We begin this paper with a brief overview of the literature on professional standards for school leaders, highlighting two bodies of literature on standards themselves followed by literature that considers standards and the role of the academy. We describe the study's context, design, and processes and interpret instructional practices from within graduate courses in educational

leadership first as negotiations of theory and practice and then as negotiations of policy-based regulatory discourses associated with professional leadership standards. We conclude with a summary of the nested possibilities within these instructional negotiations and their positioning of standards within graduate education.

Literature Review

Embedded in the use of the term standards in relation to professional practice are well-established understandings of standards as the "weight, measure, or instrument by which the accuracy of others is determined" (Etymonline, n.d.), and the accompanying governmental authority involved in establishing and regulating such measures—i.e., "the king's standard" (Etymonline, n.d.). In one register, this situates leadership standards as objective descriptions of agreed-upon professional knowledge and principles (Mulcahy, 2011; Murphy, 2000, 2015) and as part of the state's commitment to providing confidence in practice across individual actors and contexts (Lewis, 1995; Pont, 2013). Another register emphasizes standards as normative statements working within and perpetuating relations of power (Anderson & Cohen, 2015; Connell, 2009; Mulcahy, 2011). Both perspectives are active in the literature on school leadership standards.

School Leadership Standards as Objective Text

The case for school leadership competency standards as strategic tools for improving the quality of education (Pont, 2013) is based in a conceptualization of these standards as widely accepted syntheses of knowledge about school leadership. Standards are presented as reliable and coherent directories of effective school leadership practice. This transparent, representational assumption (Mulcahy, 2011) has been claimed explicitly by Murphy (2000), who described a commonly used set of American standards as "simply a framework that captures and arrays

information about leadership dispositions, knowledge, and performances" (p. 412), one that simply states “what practitioners and researchers have told us are critical aspects of effective leadership” (p. 412), and one that responds to school practitioners’ wishes for “parsimonious models and frameworks that help them to make sense of … [the] complexity” (p. 411) of their work.

This perceived need for parsimony, clarity, and consistency in describing school leadership has led to research examining the details of leadership standards and seeking to further the effective delineation, prescription, and assessment of practice (Forde et al., 2016; Goldring, et al., 2009). Such research has compared the content of standards across jurisdictions (Lambert & Bouchamma, 2019; Liu et al., 2017; Pont, 2013) and examined how professional standards guide and represent the practice of school principals (Boske, 2009; Lambert & Bouchamma, 2019; Militello et al., 2013; Riveros et al., 2016). It has also tested the legitimacy and value of specific sets of standards in relation to theoretical understandings of leadership (Berkovich & Bogler, 2020; Cherkowski & Brown, 2013).

Research examining school leadership standards in this way extends conceptualizations of standards as explicit articulations of professional practices that otherwise might remain only implicitly understood or otherwise inaccessible to practicing and developing leaders. Standards, and research supporting detailed understandings of standards, seek to contribute to improved practices within school leadership and support the legitimation of the profession. Increasingly refined standards are seen to provide practicing and aspiring school leaders points of reference for collective engagement, learning and evaluation (Forde et al., 2016; Goldring et al., 2009; Ingvarson et al., 2006) and to support public understanding of the complex work of school leadership (Murphy, 2000, 2015). They are intended to help reduce the circumstances and critiques

of individualistically variable or ad hoc forms of practice and enhance equitable access to quality education (Clarke & Moore, 2013; Pont, 2013).

Much of the research exploring the text of standards recognizes that the content of leadership competencies is articulated in similar ways across geographic, social, and political contexts and that it emphasizes managerial aspects of leadership (Berkovich & Bogler, 2020; Boske, 2009; Lambert & Bouchamma, 2019; Liu et al., 2017; Møller 2009, Riveros et al., 2016). Research beyond the representational register claims that the decontextualized character of leadership standards and their managerial emphasis is more than a matter of content: it is a matter of discourse.

School Leadership Standards as Discursive Apparatus

Critically informed research on professional standards, including those for school leaders, posits that standards are more than "neutral carriers of … knowledge" (Mulcahy, 2011, p. 98), that they are produced within and actively perpetuate powerful regulatory discourses. Standards are seen to operate within and serve as the apparatus of "regimes of truth" (Ball, 1993, p. 14, citing Foucault) that allocate the terms in which a good leader is defined and recognized. Within this body of research, school leadership standards are seen not simply to describe practice but to produce it.

Critical scholars point to the managerial emphasis of standards as part of the "operative rationale" (Berkovich & Bogler, 2020, p. 323) of neoliberalism and the market-based, efficiency logic it brings to education. Their research examines how standards-driven reforms, guided by a sense of economic competition, narrows educational purposes towards scientized, commodifiable ends (Clarke & Moore, 2013; Connell, 2009) and narrows educational practices to reductive prescriptions of "what works" (Biesta, 2007, 2010). Noting the normative terminology of standards

and standardization, critical scholars explore how leadership standards silence questions of difference, perpetuate orthodoxies of the known, and make topics of justice and marginalization invisible within their directories of legitimated knowledge (Black & Karanxha, 2013; Militello et al., 2013). They explore how standards shape leaders in a singular image (Clarke & Moore, 2013), how leaders are positioned "as bearers of variables (attitudes, qualifications, strong leadership, etc.) to be correlated with pupil outcomes" (Connell, 2009, p. 217), and how standards limit or repress broader possibilities of practice and being (Anderson, 2001, 2002; Anderson & Cohen, 2015; Parkinson, 2015). Critical researchers argue that standards contribute to the de-professionalization of educational leaders by replacing collegial, contextualized, discretionary, and diverse orientations toward leadership (Anderson & Cohen, 2015) with instrumental logics and formulaic, checklist thinking (Anderson, 2002; Clarke & Moore, 2013, Møller, 2009).

In the critical register, standards are seen to create, classify and regulate the spaces and subjects of educational leadership, to establish a form of hegemonic equilibrium (Thomas, 2008) that governs from a distance. Standards establish the means through which educators and leaders come to understand and monitor their educational roles and identities. They establish a normalizing gaze (Foucault, 1979) and an audit culture (Connell, 2009) in which the profession monitors itself through the unproblematized narratives (Shore & Wright, 2011) and common-sense terms in which it has been spoken: a panoptic success (Foucault, 1979).

School Leadership Standards and Graduate Education

Scholars such as English (2003, 2006) and Gronn (2002) have noted the economic, productive discourse of K-12 leadership standards and given pointed attention to the active, agential role it assigns the preparation of school leaders. Of particular concern is the expectation that academic programs become part of the architecture of standardization by tightly coupling

themselves (Pavalakis & Kelley, 2016) to the content of standards. Gronn (2002) framed the influence of leadership standards on the preparation of school leaders as a move toward "designer leadership", an active market logic that envisions leaders as interchangeable products, and leadership preparation programs (including university leadership programs) as intentional reproductions of pre-specified, generic leadership models (p. 561), or in terms used by English (2003), a logic that promotes the production of "cookie-cutter leaders for cookie-cutter schools".

Cautions around such tight coupling are based in commitments to the academy's entrusted role in critically questioning the status quo and its corresponding academic freedom to do so. A key role of the professoriate is to continually question practice, theory, and the perpetuations of hegemonic power they may enact within schools and society (English, 2003, 2006), a principle at odds with the teleological aims of standardization and its external determination of not only programmatic and teaching content but also the significance of that content. Cautions are also based in understandings of the field of leadership studies as dynamic, ambiguous, and multi-dimensional, full of frailties, complexities and contradictions (English, 2003, p. 33), one misrepresented in the fixed, ahistorical, and normative descriptions of leadership practice found in standards (English, 2006). Similar cautions have been raised in empirical examinations of the mandated adoption and implementation of standards within education and other professions (Orr, 2010; Parkinson, 2015; Pavalakis & Kelley, 2016; Reed & Llanes, 2010).

Whether examined as a matter of content and implementation or a matter of discourse, the presence of leadership standards in K-12 settings and university programs is found to impact the practice and identity of educational leaders through both overt and embedded performances of institutional power. The parsimonious and efficient images of leadership put forward to meet the political aims of certification and consistency are seen to represent an ontological and intellectual

sacrifice (English, 2006) on the part of both leaders and scholars. And, as Gronn (2002) identifies, the presence of professional standards in graduate education intensifies the "enduring tension… in university-based programs between the advancement of knowledge and the application of knowledge" (p. 560). It once again raises questions about theory-practice relationships in graduate professional programs (Karseth & Solbrekke, 2006).

Theoretical Framework

Such tensions and questions were part of the context in which this study arose. Tasked with the redesign of Master's level programs in educational leadership (and courses within those programs), to address new certification requirements for school leaders in Alberta, three members of our research team questioned and were questioned about this effort. We experienced and witnessed dedicated questioning related to academic freedom, to the attempted fixing of the field, and to potential losses of intellectual richness in the face of institutional and governmental aims. We also recognized the practical necessity of helping students connect their professional and educational goals and the potential sacrifice of programmatic viability in not doing so. As course designers and faculty members, we experienced a number of interactions and entanglements between the ideas of standards as objective texts and standards as complex discourses and realized that these tensions and questions would continue as students enrolled in the new courses and programs. We understood that responses to those tensions and questions would be, and in many respects only could be, developed in practice, in pedagogical, dialogic enactments. Although not of our/their own desire, we and our leadership education colleagues had become policy actors, situated "between discomfort and pragmatism" (Ball et al., 2011, p. 625), and asked, once again, to take up the question of how to live well for and with others in just institutions (Ricoeur, 1992).

We approach this study through policy enactment perspectives offered by Ball and colleagues (Ball, 1993, 2015; Ball et al., 2011, 2012; Maguire et al., 2015). Policy enactment theorizes a generative space between policy as text and policy as discourse. It rejects instrumentalist assumptions of singularly literal and compliant implementations of policy (including professional practice standards) and focuses instead on the processes and actions through which policies are interpreted, recontextualized, and displaced in specific contexts (Maguire et al., 2015) and within the agencies of policy actors.

We imagine instructional contexts to be places in which graduate education for school leaders might generatively move in the space between leadership standards as a static knowledge base and leadership study as an opening of the field. As school leadership standards enter the pedagogical spaces of the academy, we seek to understand their instructional enactments, how those enactments might work theory and practice together, and how they might interpret, recontextualize, and displace regulatory expectations.

Study Design

Research Context and Participants

This study was carried out in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary, where Master of Education programs in educational leadership were redesigned in 2019 to address new competency standards for school and school-district leaders in the province of Alberta. This involved modifications to two existing programs and the design of a new four-course graduate certificate with an emphasis on developing professional knowledge and skills that integrated research and practical knowledge. In addition to the provincial leadership practice standards, the programs were designed in accordance with the graduate competencies informed by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2007) *Ministerial Statement on Quality Assurance*

of Degree in Education in Canada, and by faculty with both theoretical and practical backgrounds in educational leadership. A dual focus on scholarship and practice was part of the programmatic background in which instruction occurred.

Instructors in the newly designed and modified programs were invited to participate in the study as we sought to understand how they negotiated compatibilities and tensions between theoretical insights and practical competency requirements within their instructional practices. Three faculty members who instructed classes in the first year of the program's implementation were interviewed to gather examples of experiences supporting graduate students' scholarly development and the competency development of leadership certification. Research participants included sessional contract instructors and full-time faculty. Two of the participants had taught previous versions of the educational leadership courses. One instructor was teaching in the Master's program for the first time. All had taught the classes of the new programs online.

Data Gathering

In our interviews with instructors, we sought a multi-dimensioned approach to engage in discussions about instructional practices. Cognitive apprenticeship (Collins et al., 1989, 1991), as a pedagogy of *praxis* that connects university study with the lived realities of school and community contexts (Black & Murtadha, 2007), offered us such an approach. Cognitive apprenticeship has been used as a frame for analyzing teaching and learning practices in several professional fields, including nursing (Woolley & Jarvis, 2007), medicine (Butler et al., 2019), pharmacy (Rodino & Wolcott, 2019), library sciences (Tompkins, 2016), engineering (Ahn, 2016), management (Wilk, 2010) and teacher education (Hockly, 2000; Knight, 2007; Peters-Burton et al., 2015). Its conceptual and pedagogical affordances are well documented and cognitive apprenticeship has been suggested as an appropriate signature pedagogy (Shulman, 2005) for

educational leadership programs (Black & Murtadha, 2007). In our interviews, cognitive apprenticeship opened a way to talk about specifics in instructional practice.

Cognitive apprenticeship is understood through four interconnected dimensions of the learning environment: 1) *content*, which involves the different types of knowledge and strategies required for expertise; 2) *method*, which outlines teaching strategies to develop that expertise; 3) *sequence*, which structures and provides meaningfulness to learning activities; and 4) *sociology*, which focuses on the social organization of learning (Collins et al., 1989, 1991). These interconnected dimensions served as an organizing construct for our interviews with instructors. They provided research-informed structure and specificity to our interview questions, and a way of bringing forth instructors' descriptions of their work with leadership students. While we asked questions across these dimensions, it was in instructors' descriptions of their work to model meaning-making processes, and to stimulate reflection and metacognition that we heard most directly of their work to connect theory and practice.

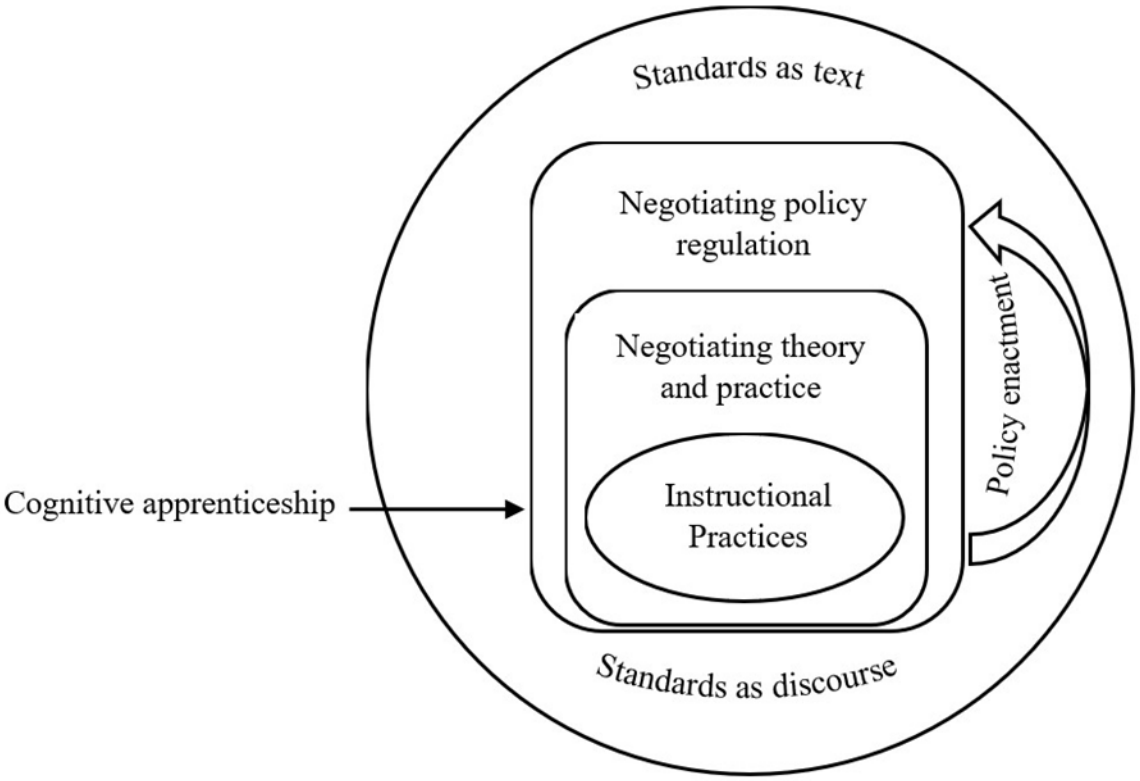
Data Analysis

Three members of the research team individually reviewed interview transcripts, using two cycles of coding. The first round of coding worked within and across the elements of cognitive apprenticeship in the responses of individual participants, staying close to the participants' language and the actions they described, noting those actions through gerund-based process codes (Saldaña, 2016). The second round of coding sought relationships and affiliations within the initial codes, and as a smaller, more coherent configuration, supported interpretations of the participants' descriptions of practice. Initial interpretive directions garnered during the interview experiences were extended through multiple readings of the interview transcripts. The ensuing coding and theming processes drew on the researchers' theoretical and contextual sensitivities and

experiences, including those developed as leadership educators. Peer-to-peer debriefing, with the participation of all four researchers, continued the interpretive process, questioning, clarifying, and refining the research findings. Our interpretation moved from findings of how faculty members negotiated theory and practice in their instruction to how those findings bore implications for negotiating complexities of policy-based regulatory discourses embedded in professional leadership standards. Figure 1 shows how ideas of cognitive apprenticeship provided a way to approach instructional practices, and how descriptions of instructional practices led to nested interpretations supported by images of policy enactment and against a background in which standards appear as both text and discourse.

Figure 1

Instructional Practices in Nested Systems of Interpretation



Negotiating Theory and Practice

In this section we share findings from our interviews with instructors and respond to the research question, "How do instructors negotiate compatibilities and tensions between theoretical insights and practical competency requirements?" We share the intentionality with which instructors sought to connect theory and practice in their students' learning experiences, and how that intentionality opened discretionary spaces in the work of advancing the scholarship and practice of school leaders. We share and interpret quotes from the participants, presenting them as fragments of conversation, yet recognizing that much of their meaningfulness in this paper is in their having been offered within the participants' overall consideration of how, in a graduate educational program connected to professional leadership standards, they have supported student learning and worked between theoretical and practical understandings of leadership. As one interview participant said, "I knew that [connecting theory and practice] was a kind of overarching theme of this whole conversation and interview. And so, I have been giving that a lot of thought."

Reading Theory and Practice Together

The instructors we spoke with recognized that in the graduate leadership programs included in this study, students were often novices to both leadership studies and formal leadership practice and needed to encounter and question one aspect of their learning through another. Theory and practice were neither cleaved together in an image of theory as a "problem-solving tool for managers in educational institutions" (Eacott, 2011, p. 135) nor in an image of research as a simple description of "what leaders do" (Eacott, 2011, p. 135) that could be taken up as a matter of reproductive practice. Nor were theory and practice held out of reach of one another. The instructors considered students' professional practice (teaching, leading, being led) to be a resource for their theoretical reading and thinking and their theoretical work as a way to examine and

reconsider experiences of and in practice. They considered theory and practice as mutually participating elements in generative, dialogic negotiations of understanding, and in conversation with students, modelled how to make connections between scholarly texts and how to develop and substantiate ideas and claims. They also elicited the diversity of student experiences as a way to enrich and sustain the learning community they were building and becoming together. As one instructor explained, "we're asking them [students] to bring experiences to the readings, check how their experiences might speak to the readings, think about how the readings might speak to their experiences".

Surpassing the Immediacy of Experience

Instructors encouraged students to draw on their practical experiences and to use theoretical works to think beyond them, to consider those experiences not as a form of complete understanding but rather as an opening into (new) understanding. They asked students to see existing practices through the possibilities of what they might mean, what they might become, and through theory, what might be at stake. Instructors directed much of their efforts to expand students' understanding of their practical experiences beyond real images and to bring students' thinking into the space(s) between practice and theory.

> I'm always looking for the opportunity to ... Well, trying to meet the students where they are and validating the thinking, but at the same time, questioning it, so being able to see a strength in their [online discussion] posts that maybe they didn't notice. Pull it out, and then play with that idea a little bit with them and invite them to step into playing with that idea with me through the conversation.
>
> Each time I'm interacting with students, there is an element of reflection that's required, because when you can engage in that conversation with them, and pick up

> their ideas, and look at them yourself in a little bit different way, and put the ideas back to the students in a little bit different way, then I think there's a moment where they kind of recognize that they have an opportunity to look not just at the situation, or the experience, or the content of what they were looking at but, they actually get to see how their way of thinking and framing ideas could be a little bit different as well.

Examining Authorities and Confidences

Instructors prompted students' reflection and metacognition to recognize and examine the various authoritative voices they were encountering, being inscribed by, and speaking through. Students were asked to consider how they were participants in discourses and how what they believed about practice was part of framings they might recognize and make visible as they examined the language of school and practice alongside the language of theory. Students were asked to consider how, if framings of practice constituted theorized tales of the world, the confidences and assumptions of their thinking were the "tell of a tale" (Jardine, 2019, p. 6).

Questions of what drew students' attention in texts and experiences, and what they were drawing on in their thinking were augmented with considerations of why that might be so. One instructor's work with students directly asked such questions.

> When you make a statement, what's causing you to say that? So that's a reflective piece, isn't it? A little bit about, okay, why am I saying that? What's making me say or react this way or respond this way to a provocation? What's making me pull these things out from the research? What's resonating with me and why? So that's a bit of the reflective piece. But also, then when I decide that I'm going to say something about it, where's that coming from? So again, that metacognitive piece of, is that

> coming from my direct experience, which is shaped by my own perspective and perception, and it's just me in my own bubble thinking these things? Or okay, this is based on something I directly observed in a classroom or school, and this is what made me say this.

Students were asked to look not just through discursive frames of leading, teaching, and learning but at them. Instructors engaged students in thinking about:

> how we might notice assumptions or taken-for-granted[s] in a reading, trying to approach it by thinking about what the author wants you as a reader to believe along with them, how they substantiate their claims, and how they situate their arguments within the scholarly field.

One instructor's description of seeking students' diverse experiences as resources for learning included inviting their social, cultural, and embodied positions into conversations as ways of questioning the assumptions of research and practice.

> I encourage students to look for absences and exclusions in the readings and resources we work with…. I can show the way to looking for some of those absences and exclusions, but just some. I can share the writings of other authors and I can share experiences I have had … my sense of being "othered" or having recognized my own blind spots, to highlight how we all see and understand partially, … I invite students to help us see absences and exclusions they recognize from … their histories and ways of being.

Instructors asked students to engage with the discursive nature of theory and practice and to turn their gaze upon the gaze that shaped their perceptions and through which they were coming

to understand the qualities and qualifications of leadership. Instructors asked that students consider the social, political, and cultural influences on, and effects of, that shaping gaze.

Engaging Theory, Practice, and Being

As an extension of their work to engage students in questions of how theory and practice might speak to one another, and remembering that the relationship between theory and practice was not the end of a conversation, instructors in our study integrated considerations of the study of leadership, the practice of leadership, and the possibilities of being a leader, in their work with students. They recognized the practices of building students' conceptual knowledge and expertise as concurrent with practices of building their identities as practitioners, as those who look upon their work through the histories, questions, identity markers, and purposes of a profession. The instructors brought theory and practice together, not simply as two perspectives on the acquisition of knowledge, skills, or other variables of effectiveness, but in recognition that their students were learning to be someone. As instructors engaged students in their coursework, they also sought to engage the students' sense of their future selves and to help them anticipate acting as and being a leader.

Engaging Sense of Future Selves

Our interviews with instructors brought forward moments in which they acted with an understanding that education is deeply connected to how we live and that their students were learning their way into new possibilities of being for themselves, their schools, and their communities. In describing a role-playing situation enacted with a former colleague to prompt discussion about the role of evidence of learning from the position of public accountabilities and in supporting a teacher's practice and community understanding of the particular work of a school,

one instructor explained, “I really wanted them to get a sense of what it feels like to *be* a principal … who's trying to be responsive and use some inquiry in their practice”.

The instructors’ concerns were not with whether students’ actually became school principals but that the presence of that possibility was recognized and held open in their learning experiences.

> The thing I was talking about, about being a leader. I think that's a really important part of the academic scholarly work that they're doing. It’s theoretical and it's based on long histories of understanding, but it's about opening a world for students. It's about being able to say, "Here's something that might be possible or might not be possible for you." I think it is important students get to live in that space a little bit as they're working through the course.
>
> You don't just get to work through a checklist [referring to the leadership standard], and then you're a leader. The kind of worries [about leadership practice] they [students] have are real and valid, and I want to them to know we’ll take time to work through that, not in a psychological sense, but in the sense of becoming someone. They have a sense of a future self that they're taking up through their study, so I try to connect with and inform those possibilities.

Anticipating Action and Being

Anticipating possibilities of being and becoming someone, of being and becoming a leader, involves anticipating responsibilities to act, and to attend to leadership not simply as a subject but as a practice between subjects.

> Whenever you can build a lived context around a learning task or help students connect a lived moment, being able to say, "So here's an example, a lived example of what might happen.". Imagine yourself in a school walking in, and this is what you see. You need to make sense of that, so how? And then talking about the work of a leader as being able to be an intellectual, conversational partner. Not just being a boss or not just being a supervisor but being able to enter into conversations with others in a way that is informed and is thoughtful, and that can recognize how, for example, how a teacher or a parent or a student might be looking at an experience, and then how to bridge that because the bridging will be the leader's responsibility.
>
> Some of the assignments ask them to do that, to situate themselves in a context, recognize what relationship they might have with a situation, and then how they might participate and lead. They're kind of existing in this ... not yet place … without the responsibility, but with the idea that there's a circumstance in which they might grow into, and they can start to think about how to enter that in a way that supports the learning of others in their school settings, but also becomes a reciprocal moment of learning for them.
>
> The practicality is the context for what they're doing, but then they have to imagine participating in that practical setting with new understandings, with new lenses. … They have to be prepared to live differently through their work because of what they've experienced and thought about, and what might that look like, and then how that might make a difference.

What and how students made sense of ideas about leading and leadership, and what and how they practiced and might practice, was seen less as a matter of implementing ideas than a

matter of entwined and productive theorizing about education, leadership, and their purposes and effects. The generative space instructors and students negotiated between theory, practice, and being focused less on the mastery and taking on of performative criteria of practice, and more on how they might enter and search for the feel of a situation in which being a leader could find definition in the social space of practice.

Negotiating Policy Regulation

In this section, we return to the descriptions of instructional work brought forward in our interviews with faculty members to hear their instructional practices as part of the mediated, generative actions of policy actors. We extend the question of how instructors negotiated compatibilities and tensions between theoretical insights and practical competency requirements to one of how, in doing so, they negotiated the regulatory text and discourse of school leadership standards.

Literary theory has long drawn attention to the meaningfulness of a text as something that arises in the dialogic space between a text and its readers (Iser, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1978) so that while the author's encoding of meaning in a text has authority, it is not absolute. It is not all that a text means or will come to mean. The meaning of a policy, like text, will always surpass its authorial intentions and is always "in a state of 'becoming', of 'was', and 'never was' and 'not quite'" (Ball, 1993, p. 11). This is the rich space of policy enactment. Instructors' dialogic ways of working in their classes is reconsidered here as possibilities for interpreting, displacing, and recontextualizing (Maguire et al., 2015) the text of school leadership standards and their regulatory impulses.

Displacing the Authority of Standards

In their work with students, instructors opened theory, practice, and school leadership standards as interpretable rather than fully authoritative texts. In bringing students, texts, and experiences together in dialogue, instructors made theory, practical experience, and standards of practice subject to questioning by one another, individual readers, and the learning community. In "asking … [students] to bring experiences to the readings, check how their experiences might speak to the readings, [and] think about how the readings might speak to their experiences" instructors displaced the centrality of any one text. The instructors brought to their students an awareness that leadership practice does not bound over theory or policy, *and* that it is also not strictly bound to them. Their instruction promoted recognition that there are theoretical cognates and governing interests at work in leadership practice and in the way it is depicted, *and* there is definition and character to be found in concrete leadership circumstances, including ones that research and standards cannot fully anticipate.

In "encourag[ing] students to look for absences and exclusions in … readings and resources," the instructors displaced the thorough confidence portrayed in the text of standards with openings into their assumptive, temporal, and partial claims. Through considerations of theory, positionality, and alliance, students were prompted to open standards as part of an ongoing societal, political conversation (imbued with moments of what was, is, and might still come to be). Instructors brought forward the awareness that leadership practice must continue to be (re)theorized and (re)experienced, that it cannot simply be catalogued from past experience.

In the dialogic thinking within the graduate courses, each text was seen as meaningful but partial, and as more meaningful through the participation of other texts and readers/actors than powerful over those others. The displacement of the authoritative position of leadership standards

interrupted the normative, productive symmetry of self-sameness, and the circularity of knowing unchecked standards might bring to bear. It opened orthodoxies of the known to possibilities of the particular and yet-to-be.

Recontextualizing Standardized Leadership

The asymmetrical or ex-centric displacements of authoritative knowing enacted in the instructors' practices offered openings to what might be otherwise amid the hegemonic orientation of standards. In eliciting and attending to the diversity of students' professional and social-historical positions, instructors created opportunities for collaborative and critical thought and construed the practice of leadership as one of acting in a shared world while also from a particular position within that world (Arendt, 1958). Instructors placed context in an interrogative dialogue with standardized depictions of leadership. They entwined the parsimony, clarity, and consistency established in the text of standards with the elaborations, uncertainty, and particularity of lived circumstances. They engaged with and recontextualized the intimacies and particularities of being a leader and addressed the hegemony of generic and apolitical leadership (English, 2003; Gronn, 2002) embedded in and asserted by standards, productive assumptions that would see leadership as occurring in the interchangeability of no place and any place, no one and anyone. In talking with their students about "how [leaders] have to be prepared to live differently through their work because of what they've experienced and thought about" and about how "to situate themselves in a context, recognize what relationship they might have with a situation, and then how they might participate and lead", instructors recontextualized leadership as a practice arising from and occurring somewhere, and as a call from someone to someone.

As a troubling of the intellectual and ontological sacrifices (English, 2006) required by the general, instructors positioned leadership as an uneasy occurrence of the particular, as an

attentiveness to what might be understood in each instance of practice. Instructors and students negotiated meanings that remained open, and subject positions that saw leaders bearing as much a responsibility to exercise judgment as to know. They recontextualized variable and "ad hoc" (Clarke & Moore, 2013) practice as intentional, situational judgement, as an act of putting existing understandings at risk on behalf of new understanding. In this re-contextualization, leadership was foregrounded as a call to meaning-making, as a heedful, interpretive act (interpreting circumstance, knowledge, self, and action) rather than compliant obedience to the implementations and managements of predetermined and standardized knowing.

Displacing the Normative Gaze

In asking students to question the narratives in the composition and adoption of standardized practice and in helping students recognize action within particular circumstances as part of how leaders understand their role and influence, instructors helped displace the power of the normative gaze. As the common-sense language of standards became open to questioning and the socio-political and temporal construction of their text became subject to scrutiny, students were offered ways to look back at the gaze through which they were being constructed as leaders and make it more visible. As the situational ground of leadership shifted the location where the effectiveness and competencies of leadership might be recognized, the piercing singularity of the normative gaze of regulated compliance began to waver.

As one instructor described, in classroom experiences that

> supported students' metacognition, they [students] could see something about how their thinking was developing … and they got to be the one to point it out. They were able to take a stance where they weren't just looking through lenses or through

discourses, but they could actually look at the discourse and how it was influencing their thinking.

To recognize oneself in a dialogic space that crosses temporal, spatial, and social questions is to recognize oneself and others as participants in a collaborative, yet contested, social endeavour, one in which a singular gaze, even a powerfully productive gaze, can be remembered as one among others. Instructors helped students recognize themselves as more than subject to the gaze of others, more than subjects of perception, but as subjects with perception, as subjects who also look. Instructors helped students gain a horizon from which they need not immediately default to normalized articulations of leading or be subject to marginalized positions created by the surveillance of remediation or professional invisibility, but one from which they might articulate untold positions of professional competence. Instructors helped students gain a horizon from which they could understand both the production and reproduction of understanding as open possibilities.

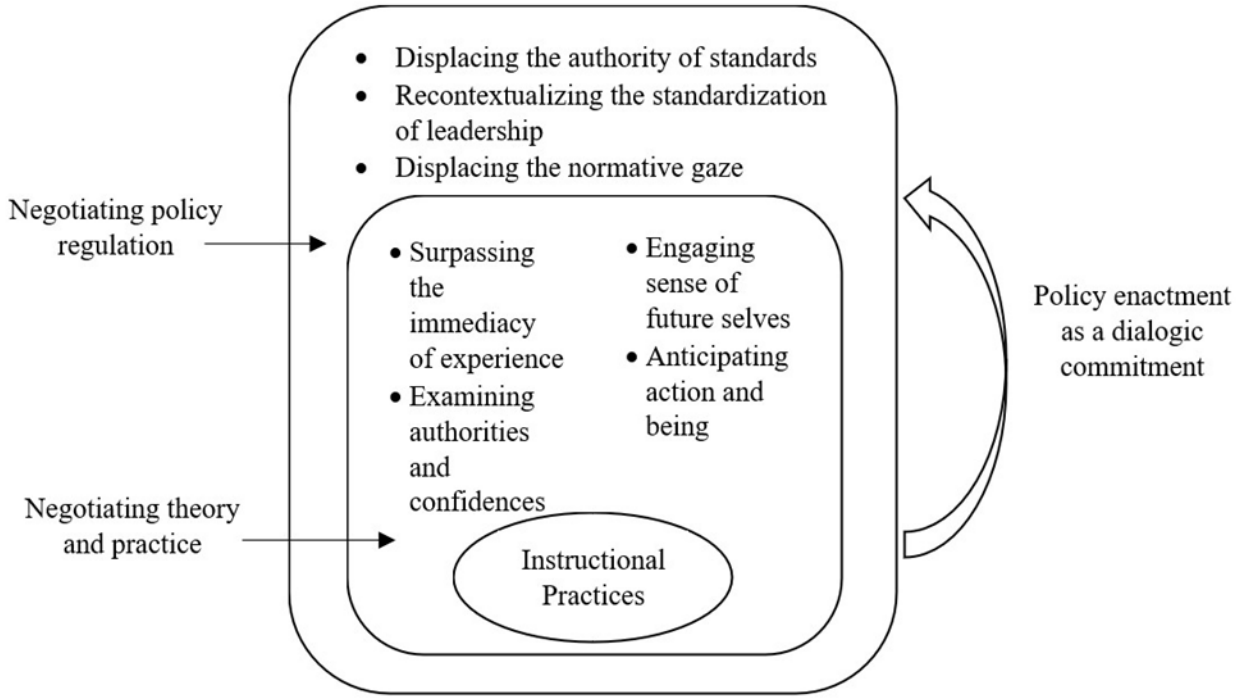
Conclusion

The presence of school leadership standards in graduate education has come to influence the scope and content of leadership programs and positioned faculty members as policy actors, implicated in how their students, including aspiring and practicing leaders, not only come to understand the theoretical field of educational leadership but also become certified practitioners. Being positioned as an agent of the teleological aims and normative architecture of standardized practice is seen, in a number of ways, to be at odds with the critical thinking and questioning role of the academy and the intellectual freedom of its members. Yet the role of policy actor can also be imagined as one of generative possibility, exceeding suggestions of literal and compliant implementation of the policies and requirements of school leadership practice standards. As we engaged faculty members in discussions of the instructional practices through which they

negotiated theory and practice in a graduate program connected to the *Alberta Leadership Quality Standard* (Alberta Education, 2020), we heard instructors describe ways they engaged students in dialogic interpretations of theory, practice, and the standards of practice. Instructors used theory and practice to help students surpass the immediacy of experience and examine authorities and confidences. They engaged students' sense of their future selves to help anticipate leadership action and being. In doing so, instructors also negotiated, and helped students negotiate, the regulatory regimes of standards by displacing their authority, recontextualizing the standardization of leadership, and displacing the standards' normative gaze. Figure 2 illustrates the findings of nested negotiations, and the influence instructors undertook in their instruction.

Figure 2

Instructional Negotiations of Theory, Practice, and Policy



From these instructors, we also heard how the possibilities of policy enactment can be taken up with generative intentionality. They offered a reminder that how "we occupy a

relationship determines its generativity" (Parkinson, 2019, p. 48). To enact generative possibilities in the study of educational leadership, instructors neither took up the school leadership practice standards as objects to be mastered and implemented nor did they dismiss them and, with them, part of the lived realities of their students' leadership contexts. Instructors brought their commitments to critical questioning with them but did not use those commitments as a way to foreclose the educational conversation as a dismissal of the standards. Such a foreclosure might leave the standards in their current state of being and serve to perpetuate the influence they might hold on students' practice as much as an orientation to literal implementation of the standards could. In either case, the standards would remain unquestioned.

Instead, the instructors enacted a commitment to dialogue. They took the standards up dialogically, "as subjects of intention" (Parkinson, 2019, p. 47) and as temporal representations of a common social endeavour in which educators, leaders, and scholars are called to act. In ways similar to how the redesign of the program occurred with the leadership standards in view, the instructors kept the text of the standards in mind through their practice. They interpreted the standards of school leadership practice with an awareness of the standards' encoded discursive productivity. They made such discursive awareness and dialogic relations possible for their students and the interpretations of leadership they might enact in their futures. In the examples of the instructors' practices, and in what was opened for students, leadership standards became as much places from which understanding and practice might extend—reminiscent of ties between the word standard and "the Old French word, *estendre,* 'to stretch out,' from the Latin, *extendere*" (Etymonline, n.d.)—as the measures by which practice would be judged and controlled.

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Author Biographies

Dr. Ronna Mosher is the Director, Professional Programs in graduate education and Assistant Professor, Curriculum and Learning in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. Her research interests include curriculum studies, literacy education, and the epistemologies and ontologies of educators' professional practice.

Dr. Lori Pamplin has served as a researcher, instructor, and course and program designer in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. Her research interests focus on the role of the principal, leadership theory, and professional learning.

Dr. Nadia Delanoy is an Assistant Professor (Adj.), Curriculum Coordinator, Project Lead for Partner Teacher PL, and researcher in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. Her research interests include evidence-based practice in assessment, leadership, and innovative pedagogies in technology-enhanced environments as well as big data and social media analytics to support innovative business practices.

Dr. Barbara Brown is Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning and Associate Professor, Learning Sciences in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. Her research interests include research-practice partnerships, professional learning, and instructional design in digital learning environments

Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Ronna Mosher
rhmosher@ucalgary.ca